

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for the continuous preparation of chlorine comprising:

~~by reaction of~~

reacting hydrogen chloride with oxygen in the presence of a heterogeneous catalyst, wherein the conversion of hydrogen chloride in a single pass through the reactor is restricted to ~~from~~ 15 to 90%,

wherein some or all of the unreacted hydrogen chloride is recirculated, and

wherein the proportion of recirculated hydrogen chloride is gradually increased during the time of operation of the catalyst.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein ~~some~~ or all of the unreacted hydrogen chloride is recirculated.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to ~~from~~ 20 to 80%.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to ~~from~~ 25 to 70%.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to ~~from~~ 30 to 60%.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the heterogeneous catalyst used is a doped or undoped supported ruthenium catalyst.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the proportion of recirculated hydrogen chloride or recycle ratio is gradually increased during the time of operation of the catalyst in a manner that increases the operating life of the catalyst.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out using from 2 to 10 reactors connected in series.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 8, wherein the introduction of oxygen is divided over a plurality of reactors.

Claim 10 (New): The process of claim 1, wherein the ratio of hydrogen chloride to oxygen at the inlet to the reactor ranges from 1:1 to 20:1.

Claim 11 (New): The process of claim 1, wherein the ratio of hydrogen chloride to oxygen at the inlet to the reactor ranges from 3:1 to 5:1.